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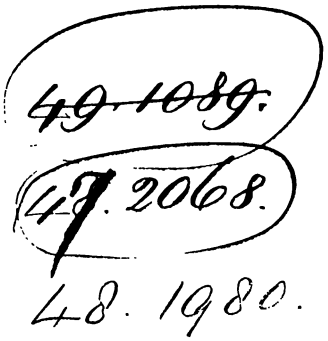
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THE CHILD'S HELP TO SELF-EXAMINATION AND PRAYER.

BY
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PREFACE.

MANY persons object to all helps to devotion, from the idea that, after the heart has been changed by divine grace, they are unnecessary; and, previous to this, they are useless. They say, that it is dangerous to teach either old or young to act the part of Christians, until they are so in heart, — to use the language of a child of God, until they have that renewed spirit, which only can sincerely cry, Abba, Father. Caution is certainly required in this matter; lest, instead of aiding, we should retard the work of God in the soul, by causing men to take for granted that the great and momentous change, designated,

in Scripture, as passing "from death unto life,"—being "born again,"—has been effected on them, while they are, in reality, still in the natural state of spiritual death. The danger of self-deception, on this point, is much increased by the latitude with which the name Christian is used, which, instead of being peculiar to the little flock of Christ's disciples, is claimed by, and applied to, millions of individuals who openly deny Him, by wicked or worldly lives. But we must not refrain from all such attempts at usefulness, from the fear of making hypocrites or self-deceivers. It is, indeed, desirable to avoid this as much as possible, and to choose means least likely to lead to such a result; but if we sit still and do nothing, till we have discovered the means of instructing and benefiting others, without running any hazard of this, I fear many souls around us may perish for lack of knowledge, while we are calmly considering the best way *of imparting* it. Whilst we hesitate to sow

the seed of the Gospel, lest a few *tare seeds* should intermingle with it, we leave the field free to be filled with Satan's rank crop of unmixed tares. I am willing to confess that many well-meant efforts for good, in the present day, have a direct tendency to promote the form of godliness without the power; nay, more, to make men rest so much in the form, as to be ignorant of their need of the power. But, while I admit this, I am convinced that, from the constant tendency of man's corrupt heart to forget the very existence of a God, the worst contrived scheme for keeping this great truth in remembrance is better than no contrivance at all, — that the most injudicious effort to promote the salvation of souls is better than the absence of all efforts for this purpose. I do not commend, nor even excuse, injudicious efforts; I only maintain that some efforts must be put forth to pluck men from eternal perdition; and I believe, that in pro*portion as* our eye is singly bent on the glory

of God, He will bless the good, and neutralise the evil, which our efforts may contain.

The season of youth is a favourable time for sowing the incorruptible seed of the Word. The conscience is more tender — the feelings less depraved — the passions less fierce — than in after life; the crowd of worldly thoughts and schemes have not yet beaten down the soil into the hardness of the highway, nor have the thorns of care been planted in it. It is very desirable that children should acquire the habit of turning their thoughts inward — to commune with their own hearts — to meditate on the truths of the Gospel — and to seek after that communion with God, to restore which is the chief end of religion. This little work treats only of the form of meditation which is most easily exercised, and most susceptible of advancement by outward helps — that of self-examination; but the continued practice of this may tend to facilitate meditation on other subjects.

I have endeavoured to avoid all doctrinal subtleties and nice distinctions, because I consider that to present religious truth to the youthful mind in the shape of a theological system, is more calculated to raise curious questions, which the teacher may find difficult to answer, than it is to touch the conscience, or warm the affections. I have endeavoured to construct the whole on two great scriptural principles, which are reconcileable, though I pretend not to be able to reconcile them to the satisfaction of the logician, — viz. : That salvation, from first to last, as well in the individual application as in the procuring cause, is all of free grace ; and that men are responsible beings, whom God deals with in His word as such ; and whom, if they die impenitent and unbelieving, He will deal with, at the day of judgment, as creatures who might have been saved by the gospel, but would not.

May, 1835.

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INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

My dear young friend,

Permit me to address to you the important advice given by one of the wisest of men,— "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." * Children are apt to imagine that there is nothing required of them but to obey their parents and teachers, and attend diligently to their studies. These duties, no doubt, must be done; but there are other duties that must not be left undone. It is both delightful and improving to spend our time in employments that tend to refine and enlarge the mind, and prepare us for future usefulness among our fellow creatures; and, if we were innocent and happy beings, these

* Eccles. xii. 1.

might be our sole occupations, because they would naturally lead the minds of holy and pure creatures to God, the fountain of all holiness and purity. But I hope you are, by this time, aware, that instead of being innocent and happy, we are sinful and miserable; certain of death, and liable to eternal punishment. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;"—"only evil continually." * We daily commit sin; and God cannot look on sin without abhorrence. It is, therefore, our first duty, and chief interest, to inquire how we can be reconciled to a justly offended God. And our Almighty Father himself has been pleased to inform us, in his word, how a sinful creature may be justified in his sight,—may escape punishment, and inherit immortal glory. Surely, then, it is folly to let any study interfere with the study of religion, since this alone can make us wise in time, and happy through eternity.

"Remember, then, thy Creator in the days of thy youth." You do not know whether

* Gen. viii. 21,—vi. 5.

you may be spared to see any other days. If the Lord has already spoken in your family, by taking away a brother or a sister, O, do not disregard the warning message; nor render useless to yourself, a dispensation meant to remind you of the shortness and uncertainty of human life. If death has not yet visited your father's house, remember you may, perhaps, be the first God intends to call away, and tremble at the thought of being unprepared.

Perhaps you are ready to say, "I do remember my Creator. I pray to Him every morning and evening; I read my Bible; I go to church every Sunday; and repeat catechisms and hymns." My dear young friend, you may do all these without remembering God, as He ought to be remembered. You do them because your parents or teachers desire you; and I am afraid, if they were careless in seeing that you attended to these things, you would let them alone. It is a great mistake to suppose that religion consists in mere outward observances. Your parents instruct you in the doctrines of the Bible; they endeavour to

prevent you from transgressing its precepts, and they put within your reach those outward means of grace which God hath appointed. But this is all they can do. With yourself it remains to make the proper use of these advantages, or to neglect them altogether. Our friends may point out what we are to do; but it is we ourselves who must "work out our own salvation, with fear and trembling."

Do not suppose that God will overlook your faults, because you are so young. You know right from wrong, you are therefore an accountable being. And should you die now, without having come to Christ, and having been renewed by the Holy Spirit, you must go to the place of everlasting misery, because you are totally unfit for heaven.

"What then can I do?—How can I be rendered fit for heaven?" I hear you ask. Pray to God, that He may show you, by His Holy Spirit, the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, and render you fit for heaven, by giving you a new heart. Perhaps you will say, this is your daily prayer. Remember what prayer *is*. *It is not* merely repeating a form of sound

words. A parrot might be taught to repeat a prayer; but it is only a rational being who can lift up his heart and thoughts to God in prayer. We must not only pray with the lips, but with the understanding also. When we ask blessings from God, we must really desire to receive them, or we cannot expect that He will grant them.

Many young people—and I am afraid some old people too—go away from the midst of laughter and folly, and kneel down before their Maker, with confused and wandering thoughts, and their minds yet filled with the nonsense they have been hearing and speaking. Surely this is the sacrifice of fools. The Lord looketh on the heart; and if he finds it filled with vanity and folly, at the very time the lips are addressing Him, and pronouncing His holy name, He will consider that prayer an insult, and an abomination.

Christians, in all ages, have found that examining their own state and character, and meditating thereupon, is an excellent preparation for prayer. Self-examination leads them to perceive their transgressions of the law of

God, and they thus learn for what sins they must pray to be forgiven, and what duties they more especially require grace to enable them to perform. Every age and condition of life has its peculiar duties, and peculiar trials. Childhood abounds in both. Young people are apt to fancy that it will be time enough to attend particularly to their conduct when they are a little older; they do not mark their transgressions of God's law; and though they must be conscious that they frequently disobey their parents, I am afraid they do not remember that, in so doing, they offend the Lord. They judge of the greatness of their fault, by the measure of their parents' anger; forgetting that they commit many faults their parents neither see nor hear of, which are all done in the sight of God, which he marks with displeasure, and, unless they are sincerely repented of, will visit with chastisement. Our hearts are so extremely deceitful, and so often succeed in persuading us that sin is not sin, that it sometimes requires a careful examination of our conduct, by the rules laid down in the *Bible, before* we can discover "our secret

faults, and presumptuous sins." To assist young persons in this necessary and important duty, the following pages were composed. They will point out to you the faults of children in general; and your own conscience will tell you which are yours in particular. But you must not be satisfied with the first answer of your conscience, when it acquits you of this, or the other sin. If you are anxious to find yourself without faults, you will too easily succeed in teaching your conscience to deceive you, by ceasing to tell you what you do not wish to know. Examine your conduct again and again; inquire how you have discharged your duty to God, to your parents, your teachers, your brothers and sisters, your companions, and your servants. Do not suppose that God will overlook any breach of duty; nor think that, while you perform your principal duties with care, you may be permitted to neglect others.

Remember the use of this self-examination. It is not to deceive you with false hopes of gaining heaven by the performance of your duties; but, by showing you how, in all of

them, you offend, and come short of the glory of God, to convince you of the necessity of a Redeemer, and to lead you earnestly and fervently to pray that God would enable you to believe on him, to the saving of your soul. It is a sad mistake into which young people fall, when they say within themselves:—"If I am a good boy, or a good girl, I shall go to heaven." My dear child, remember that Christ himself hath said, "There is none good but one, that is, God."* The holiest men that have ever lived on earth, have confessed themselves to be sinners, unworthy of the least of God's mercies. The Apostle Paul declared that in him dwelt no good thing; and neither does any good thing dwell in you. Your only hope of heaven is, through the mercy of God, in Christ Jesus. Remember what gracious encouragement your Saviour has given you:—"Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not."† Even *little children* are invited. Do not then think yourself too young, or too insignificant, to obtain God's notice. He that feedeth the young

* Matt. xix. 17. † Ibid. ver. 14.

ravens when they cry, will hear and answer your petitions. O, pray to Him, then, to renew your corrupt nature! To create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within you!

Perhaps you do not very well know what *meditation* means. I will try to explain it to you. To meditate upon any thing is just to think seriously about it. If we find we have been guilty of a fault, and then think no more of it, we can neither repent of it, nor turn from it. But if we sit and think of it again and again, and remember how wicked we have been in disobeying our parents and offending God,—perhaps calling to mind how often we have been corrected for this fault, or how often we have resolved not to commit it again,—this is *meditating* upon it to good purpose; and this meditation leads us to pray to God to forgive us, for Christ's sake; and to beg Him to enable us in future to guard against it.

I must say a few words more to you about prayer. Children are generally made to learn a prayer by heart, out of a book, and then repeat it morning and evening. This is because, *when very young*, they are supposed not to be

able to pray of their own accord, from ignorance of what to ask, and how to ask it. But when they get older, and better instructed, it is very desirable that they should be able to add a few petitions of their own to the prayer they have been accustomed to repeat. Every one has some particular mercy to thank God for, some particular sin to confess, and some particular temptation which they must pray for strength to guard against. Many of these nobody on earth but yourself can know. Others cannot, therefore, compose prayers for you, suited to every occasion. You should try to speak to the Lord in your own words; you will not find it difficult, if your heart is really in the employment. He will hear and answer you, although your petitions be ever so short and unconnected. I think the following meditations will help you to do this. I think you will find it easy to turn the subject of them into a prayer. I will give you one or two examples how it may be done; and the rest, I hope, you will be able to make the same use of for yourself.

Should this little book come into the hands

of those who are so unhappy as to have parents that are careless about their spiritual welfare, and do not instruct them in the great concerns of eternity,—or of one of those who have neither parent nor friend to instruct them in the doctrines and duties of Christianity,—remember, dear child, that you have a heavenly Father, who is able to supply all your wants. He has given you, in the Bible, all that is necessary for you to know concerning the way of salvation; and has promised you the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to enable you to understand what you read. Go, then, to Him, and beg His heavenly teaching, which will more than supply the loss of the best earthly instructor.

Before taking leave of you, I wish to say a few words about what I fear is a very common mistake. Children are apt to think religion is nothing but a system of restraints; that is, that it is just meant to tell them a great many things which they must not do. Now, as many of those forbidden things are things we are naturally fond of, this gives young people the idea *that religion* teaches us to live a sort of

dull and melancholy life here, in the hope of being rewarded for it by a happy life in the world to come. My dear child, this is Satan's picture of religion; this is what he presents to you, when he wishes to draw you away from the service of God, and to make you his own slave. True religion is happiness; — happiness now, and happiness through all eternity. When God created man, it was for the purpose of making him a partaker of his own happiness; but through the fall of our first parents, the nature of man has become so base and earthly, that he cannot understand this sort of happiness, and has no desire for it; preferring the foolish and vain pleasures of this present world. What would you think of a family of young people, nearly grown up, who, instead of liking to converse with their kind father, to walk with him, and be his constant companions, preferred still to remain in the nursery, playing with their balls, and tops, and dolls? Surely you would think them very silly; and you would not think their father harsh or unkind, if he told them, day after day, to leave those childish things, and come to be instructed

by him; and if they would not attend to him, you would feel no surprise if he at length took all their foolish toys, and threw them into the fire. Now, my dear child, we are all by nature like this childish and silly family; and God acts to us the part of the kind father, telling us to leave the foolish and sinful pleasures of the world, and to hold communion and fellowship with himself. And when He afflicts us, and takes away the things on which we set our affections, it is because He sees there is no other way of weaning us from them, and leading us to seek after those higher pleasures, which He knows can alone make us truly happy.

Farewell, my dear child; may the following meditations be blest to your soul; and if they be, give all the praise to that God "by whose grace you are saved."

DIRECTIONS FOR USING THIS BOOK.

Read over the following heads of self-examination, every evening, before you pray. Make a pause at the end of each, and consider what answer your conscience gives. Notice, particularly, the sin or sins of which you have been most guilty, and read over the meditations upon the subject of those sins. Then endeavour to introduce the subject of the meditation into your prayers, in the manner of which I have given you some examples.

HEADS OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

Have I this day been forgetful of God?

Careless about the concerns of my soul?

Have I neglected, or been careless of, my prayers?

Neglected to read my Bible, or read it carelessly?

Neglected, or been careless, in any of my duties?

Disobeyed my parents?

Have I been angry at any one?

Indulged emotions of hatred towards them?

Or of revenge against them?

Have I been proud, or self-conceited?

Vain of my person, dress, acquirements, &c.?

Have I been selfish?

Or obstinate?

Or peevish?

Have I been hasty or impatient in my manner?

Have I used deceit of any kind, concealment of the truth, or prevarication?

Have I indulged in satire, or uncharitableness, or foolish tattling?

Have I been envious of any one?

Have I trifled or wasted my time?

Have I been too much occupied with trifles?

Or too keenly attached to a favourite object?

Have I indulged in improper thoughts or words?

Have I talked lightly of serious things?

Have I been careless in church?

MEDITATION I.

ON CARELESSNESS ABOUT OUR SOULS.

I have read in my Bible: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" * The soul must, therefore, be very precious. Let me examine, then, if I am attending to the concerns of my soul. I am very sure that I attend to my body, for how anxious am I to feed and clothe it; I not only cover it to protect it from cold, but am at pains to dress and adorn it, that it may look well in the eyes of others. How fearful am I lest anything should hurt it, and when it is attacked by sickness, how careful I am to do everything that may help to recover it! And I know it is right that I should take

* Mark, viii. 36.

care of my health, for without it I could not be so useful to those about me; yet of this body, about which I am so careful, the Scripture says,* that it would be better to have it maimed and disfigured, to have the eyes plucked out, and the feet and hands cut off, than to have the soul injured. And it would indeed be better to go through life in this miserable state, than to have the soul cast "into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched."† But although I know, and am convinced of all this, I fear I do not act as if I believed it. In the morning, I pray to God to take care of my soul, and keep it, as well as my body, from all evil; but I rise from my knees, sometimes, scarcely conscious of what I have been saying. I engage in my studies, and then in my amusements, and, throughout the whole day, think no more of my soul than if I had not one. When my teacher ‡ talks to me about the value of my soul, I listen to him with the greatest indifference; and the most

* Mark, ix. 43—48. † Ibid.

‡ This word may be supplied by "Father, "Mother," "*Sister*," &c.

trifling circumstance in the world withdraws my attention from what he is saying. If he had told me any entertaining story, or any piece of news he had heard about my companions, I should have listened attentively, and should not have forgotten a word he said; and instead of wearying of the subject, and wishing he would have done with it, as I often do when he is talking about religion, I would have sat as long as he chose, and have begged him to tell me more. When he speaks about death, I regard it as something at such a great distance, that it is needless to think about it at present; and yet I have known some of my companions, younger than myself, carried away to the cold grave.

Am I wise in thus preferring an amusing tale to the truths of eternity? In taking more care of, and being more concerned for my body, my clothes, my books, nay, my very toys, than my immortal soul? Surely, my heart must indeed be what the Bible calls it: "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." * What would become of me, if I were to die in this careless state? There was

* Jer. xvii. 9.

a certain rich man, we are told, who did not care about anything but spending his time pleasantly in this world, and when he had just been looking at the quantity of goods he had laid up, and was thinking how happy he should be for many years to come, "God said unto him: Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."* If God should say that to me, this very night, where would my soul go to? I tremble to think of it. I will go immediately and pray to God to pardon my former carelessness, for Christ's sake; and beg Him to enable me, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to think more in future of the things that belong to my everlasting peace.

[Supposing that, in the former part of your prayer, you have praised the Lord for His goodness, and thanked Him for His mercies and confessed your sins before Him, I will show you how you may turn the subject of the foregoing meditation into petitions for grace, to enable you to be more attentive to the concerns of your soul.]

* Luke, xii. 20.

Oh, Lord! I beseech Thee to enable me, by Thy grace, to be more deeply concerned for the salvation of my precious soul. Suffer me not to bestow all my care on this perishing body, which must soon return to the dust; but send Thy Holy Spirit to enlighten my understanding, and make me see the sin and danger of my present careless state. Every good gift, and every perfect gift cometh down from Thee. Be pleased, then, O God, to bestow upon me the gifts of faith and repentance; that I may be enabled to see the error of my former ways, to turn unto Thee and live. These blessings I ask in the name of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

MEDITATION II.

ON THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."* The Bible, then, is written by God himself. It is His voice speaking to us. With what reverence we ought to attend to it! How careful should we be to impress it upon our minds, since from it alone we can learn the way to be happy through all eternity.

Let me think awhile on what this holy book contains. We learn from it, that when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, their nature became sinful and corrupted; and their hearts were

* *2 Timothy*, iii. 16. 2 Peter, i. 21.

ever after naturally inclined to evil. This corrupt nature and continual inclination to evil, every man and woman, that has since been born, has inherited from them. The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* Out of this evil heart all sin proceeds, and "the wages of sin is death."† "But God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."‡ "All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."§ What a wonderful history is that of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! He is "over all, God blessed for ever;"‖ yet out of pity to sinners He became a man, lived a life of trial and suffering, and at last died on the cross. "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."¶ He died, that we might live; we are by nature dead in trespasses and sins; but "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he

* Gen. viii. 21. † Rom. vi. 23. ‡ John, iii. 16.
§ Isaiah, liii. 6 ‖ Rom. ix. 5. ¶ 1 Pet. iii. 18.

that hath not the Son of God, hath not life."* How much do men value natural life! There are few men who would not, on their death-bed, give all they have to purchase life again, if it were possible. And yet we are so insensible to the value of spiritual life, that though it is freely offered to all, few care to accept it, or seek after it. Like those in our Lord's parable of the marriage supper, they make light of the good message: one goes to his farm, and another to his merchandise; and children go to their vain amusements; every one loving the things of the present world better than eternal life. But how wonderful is the love of God! Even for this folly and ingratitude a remedy is provided. It is the office of the Holy Ghost to convince men of sin, and to take of the things of Christ, and to show them unto men. It is the Spirit that quickeneth, or giveth, life; the flesh, or natural understanding, profiteth nothing. "The carnal mind (or natural disposition) is enmity against God." † We are naturally unable to understand thoroughly the great things God hath done for us: "The

* 1 John, v. 11, 12. † Rom. viii. 7.

natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* This means that the corruption of our nature has so darkened our minds, that we cannot understand nor believe the word of God without His assistance. But God has promised to "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him," † "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light," ‡ "that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God." § This Holy Spirit not only enlightens the understanding but purifies and renews the heart. Even if I could go to heaven, with my present wicked and foolish heart I could not be happy there; I should not be fit for the society of saints and angels; I should have no pleasure in their employments, and I could not get those silly and vain amusements in which I delight myself here. But God says, in his holy book, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." ‖ I must earnestly pray to Him,

* 1 Cor. ii. 14. † Luke, xi. 13. ‡ Acts, xxvi. 18.
§ 1 Cor. ii. 12. ‖ Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

that He would give me this new heart, that I may be enabled to serve Him here and enjoy Him hereafter. I will go and ask it from Him now.

[The foregoing meditation affords such subject for adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and petition, the four great divisions of prayer, that I shall set you down an example of a whole prayer made from it.]

PRAYER.

Almighty and most merciful God! who dwellest in the heavens above, I come to the footstool of Thy mercy, to offer up my tribute of praise and thanksgiving. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created." * Thou art ever glorious and happy, and hast no need of our worship and service; but Thou, of Thy great goodness, dost permit a child like

* Rev. iv. 11.

me to approach Thee, and to lift up my hands, and voice, and heart to the Most High God. I desire to thank Thee for all the mercies Thou hast bestowed upon me ever since I was born. While many poor children around me are suffering from neglect, and poverty, and sickness, Thou hast given me parents, and a home, and health, and every comfort. Yet so evil and corrupt is my heart, that I am ungrateful for all thy mercies. I disobey my parents, and forget Thee, the bountiful giver of everything I enjoy. Oh, Lord! I beseech Thee to take away this evil heart; "create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." * Enable me to understand and to enjoy the benefits of that atonement which Jesus Christ has made for sinners; let me be washed and sanctified, and justified through Him.

[Here pray for your parents, brothers and sisters, friends, teacher, &c.]

Hear my prayers, O God, for the sake of Jesus Christ. And to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

* Psalm li. 10.

MEDITATION III.

ON INGRATITUDE TO GOD.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."* Jesus hath declared this to be "the first and great commandment." Whatever He commands, we must endeavour to do, for "his words shall not pass away." Let me think, then, upon all the mercies I have received from God; and examine whether my heart be grateful for them. The Lord made me, and has preserved me alive unto this day; He has conducted me in safety through the many diseases to which children are liable, and in which many of them die every year; He has given me kind parents who take care of me,

* Matt. xxii. 37.

and instruct me, and are continually thinking about my happiness and welfare. While many children have to beg their bread from door to door, clothed in rags, I have my food and clothing provided, without any trouble on my part. There are many people in the world so lame that they can scarcely walk; and there are blind people, who cannot move about without some one to lead them, and who cannot see any thing at all; and deaf and dumb people; and poor creatures who have not the use of reason, and live shut up in a kind of prison, that they may not do mischief to others. God might have made me like any or all of these; but He has given me health of body, and soundness of mind; so that I can run about, and look at every thing, and hear, and speak, and read, and play with my companions, and converse with my friends. While many poor people, out of their hard earnings, save with difficulty a penny or twopence a week, to purchase a Bible, I have one which cost me nothing. They can only read theirs when they have a few spare minutes from their daily labour; but I might read mine

for hours together, if I pleased. What can I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? Surely, I might pay Him the tribute of gratitude; but this, alas! I do not; I am too apt to regard His gifts as being my own property, to which I have a right; forgetting that, if He pleased, he might take them all away in a moment, and I could have no power to keep any one of them. "The Lord made us, and not we ourselves;" * therefore both we and all that belongs to us are His property; and He can do with us what He pleases. Instead of being always thankful for the comforts I possess, I sometimes grumble at my food, or my clothes, and do not think them good enough for me. Instead of being grateful to my Almighty Father, for having placed me where I have teachers provided me, and do not run idle about the streets like many poor ignorant children, I often think my lessons dull and tiresome, and would like to let them alone altogether; I do not set much value upon my Bible, and seldom read it without being desired. If I had been thus ungrateful to any earthly

* Psalm c. 3.

friend, and had despised his gifts as I have done those of God, he would long since have forsaken me. If I continue to neglect God and His gifts as I have done, He may perhaps take them away from me; nay, worse than all this, if I should die in this sinful state of ingratitude and forgetfulness, He will banish me from His presence for ever. For "the wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all they that forget God." Let me, therefore, go directly, and pray that the Holy Spirit would direct my heart unto the love of God.*

* 2 Thess. iii. 5.

MEDITATION IV.

ON BEING OCCUPIED WITH TRIFLES.

"This I say, brethren, the time is short:" "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might," "redeeming the time, because the days are evil."* What a valuable thing is time! If we lose anything else in the world, we may hope to gain it again; but every moment of time that flies away carries off with it a part of our existence that we never get back again. Our life flies away very quickly. I remember when I thought it would be a long time before I should be as old as I am now; yet year after year has past away insensibly; and so, I suppose, will they continue to do. "When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return." † This

* 1 Cor. vii. 29. Eccles. ix. 10. Eph. v. 16.
† Job xvi. 22.

will be the case, even if I live to be old; but, perhaps, I may never see old age, and may be taken out of the world before another year has gone over my head. Therefore, since I am quite sure my time is short, and do not know how very short it may be, I ought to fill it up with the most useful employments. My first care should be to pray to God, and read His word, as he has commanded us; my next, to attend to those studies which my parents think it right I should pursue; and, after that, it is lawful for me to indulge a little in those innocent amusements that conduce to the health of my body, and the recreation of my mind; provided I am careful that such amusements do not indispose me for my duty, or occupy that place in my time or thoughts that ought to be given to more important matters. People should always bestow most of their attention on those things that are of greatest importance. It is of more consequence that I should be a well-educated, and well-informed person, than that I should pass many hours every day in mirth and amusement;—it is of more consequence that I should be eternally happy in heaven,

than that I should be either intelligent or gay. Yet, knowing this, as I do, I bestow my attention exactly in the contrary manner from what I ought.—I am most concerned about being merry and amused; next about being reckoned clever and accomplished; and least of all about being truly pious and amiable. I often hurry over my prayers and my Bible in the morning, for the purpose of snatching a few minutes play before I begin my lessons. Often, while I am at my studies, my mind is wandering after my amusements; and, as soon as they are over, I fly with eagerness to my play, and think of nothing else all day. Even when I am engaged in my devotions, the merest trifle will divert my attention from them, and set me to think on some foolish thing, at the very time I am on my knees before the Lord, or reading his holy book. My evil heart, indeed, makes me a careless and wicked child. I will pray to God that He would renew it by his Holy Spirit, and that He would "so teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom." *

* Psalm xc. 12.

MEDITATION V.

ON DISOBEDIENCE TO PARENTS.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." "Cursed is he that setteth light by his father or his mother."* This is one of the positive commands of God. One might think it were almost needless to tell children to love those kind parents who do so much for them, and to obey those wiser and older friends who know, so much better than they can possibly do, what is proper for children; because it might be supposed, that young people who have any sense would naturally feel the one a pleasure, and the other a duty. But He who "knew what was in man," knew that we are all, by nature, sinful and foolish creatures, and that it is therefore needful we

* Eph. vi. 1. Deut. xxvii. 16.

should have every part of our duty pointed out to us.

But, even when we know our duty, how careless are we in performing it! How many times have I broken this commandment! How often do I "set light" by my father and mother! I frequently think the injunctions they give me to be careful not to do so and so, little better than idle whims, and imagine that they fancy there is danger in many things, which I know to be perfectly safe. Surely I must be both ignorant and conceited, to suppose that I can know anything better than my parents, who have lived so many more years in the world than I have! I often directly disobey them, by omitting to do what they desire me, and doing what they positively forbid me to do. And when I am obliged to do what I do not like, how often I murmur against them, and think it very hard that I should be forced to give up my own will, and my own opinion, to theirs! When I have been corrected by them for a fault, what anger have I felt in my heart against them; and, when I think I may *do so with* impunity, how often do I indulge

myself in talking rudely to them, and giving them impertinent answers, forgetting that God hath commanded me to *honour* my father and mother! It is strange that I should have such resentful feelings towards them when they correct me, when I know quite well it is their duty; for God has positively desired them to do so. "Chasten thy son while there is hope," He says to them, "and let not thy soul spare for his crying." "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." * Let me, then, endeavour not to deserve punishment from them, instead of being angry with them when they inflict it. And I will pray to God, from whom cometh down "every good and every perfect gift," that He would help me, by His grace, without which I am unable to do anything right, to love, honour, and obey my parents more in future.

* Prov. xix. 18; xxii. 15.

MEDITATION VI.

ON ANGER.

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." * "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all malice." † "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." ‡ Alas! how often am I angry with my brothers, and sisters, and companions, without a cause; for the things which rouse my anger, although they seem of consequence at the time, afterwards appear to me to be mere trifles, unworthy of a moment's thought. If any one refuses my requests, or does anything contrary to my

* *Prov.* xvi. 32. † Eph. iv. 31. ‡ Matt. v. 22.

wishes, I am instantly seized with anger; nay, even a cross or impertinent word, or a disagreeable look, makes my heart burn within me; and I feel that I could, with pleasure, do something to vex or to injure the person who has thus offended me: and when any provoking circumstance occurs, at which, perhaps, it may be natural to feel angry, how far am I from "ruling my spirit!" I instantly break forth into "bitterness, and wrath, and clamour, and evil-speaking." "A soft answer turneth away wrath;" but my answers are rather those "grievous words that stir up anger."* How often has a silly trifle, that might have passed over without notice, had I been able to command my temper, been swelled into a serious quarrel, by my taunting and reproachful manner of speaking! And how often, in the midst of my passion, has conscience told me I was doing wrong, and yet my wicked and corrupt heart would not let me stop, until my tongue had given vent to all the wrath and malice that was in it!

This is a most grievous sin. I have often

* Prov. xv. 1.

been told that anger is the most dangerous of all passions to give way to; for though it may appear trifling in a boy or girl, yet when it continues to be indulged, it grows into a habit, and dreadful consequences often follow from it. It is this wicked passion that occasions quarrels and bloodshed, and sometimes makes people so completely forget God and His commandments that, for a trifling affront, or a few impertinent words, men will fight together, and shed each other's blood; and sometimes this dreadful combat ends by one of their wretched souls being sent into the presence of its Maker and its Judge, in the very act of disobeying His commandments; while the unhappy murderer goes mourning all the rest of his days, with the dreadful reflection that he has destroyed both the body and the soul of his companion. I must pray earnestly to God, that He would enable me to check my angry passions; and if I were to say a few words of prayer inwardly, when I feel myself about to give way to anger, it might stop my passion, and make me more calm and mild. The anger I feel is a very different sort of anger from that which my parents

feel when I have done wrong ; their anger proceeds from love to me, because, if they did not care for me, they would not trouble themselves to be angry when I commit a fault ; but I do not feel any love towards the person with whom I am angry, but a great deal of dislike and ill-will. God has promised to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, and "the fruit of the Spirit is love, peace, long-suffering, and gentleness." I will therefore go and pray to Him to give me the Holy Spirit ; that, instead of being angry and quarrelsome, I may become gentle and peaceable.

MEDITATION VII.

HATRED OR MALICE.

"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart."* When I have been very angry with a person, and often thought upon the offence he† has given me, I have felt in my mind such a settled dislike towards him, that it might well deserve the name of hatred. Sometimes I have done all I could to tease and provoke him; and often, when I have not had it in my power to do so, I have still felt that I should have liked nothing so much as an opportunity to hurt him in some way. I have felt my heart rise against him, the instant he came into my sight; and if

* Leviticus, xix. 17.

† When a girl has felt this dislike to one of her female *companions,* she will, in reading this, change HE into *SHE, and* HIM into HER, &c.

any one praised him, or told any good of him, I have felt vexed and angry, to think that any one should love him. This is nothing less than "hating my brother in my heart;" because, in the Bible, the word *brother* does not always mean one's own brother, but means one of our brethren of mankind,—any of our companions or acquaintance. And what a fearful thing the Apostle John says about hating one's brother! "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer."* The same wicked passion of hatred that makes one man kill another, makes children strike one another, or wish to do it, if they were not afraid of being punished. And if a little boy's strength were equal to his passion, the blow that gives a black eye, or makes the nose bleed, would strike his companion dead in a moment. He is therefore a murderer in God's sight, whether the blow hurts or not; nay, whether he has struck a blow at all, or not, if "he hateth his brother," he "is a murderer" in the eyes of that Great and Holy Being, who "discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Sometimes I have felt that my hatred to a person is

* 1 John, iii. 15.

wrong, and have endeavoured to overcome it; but still, although I could be outwardly civil to him (and that even was difficult), I could not change my hatred into benevolence. It is God alone who can root out our evil passions; and it is our business to pray to Him to do so. I will therefore pray to Him, to enable me to put away "all bitterness, and wrath, and clamour, and evil speaking, and all malice."*

* Eph. iv. 31.

MEDITATION VIII.

REVENGE.

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath." "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any."* This is the command of God, in regard to our treatment of those who we think have injured us. How strange it is, then, that although He has put it down in His Book, which all have in their hands, many people should maintain that it shows a want of spirit to bear an injury tamely! And that to resent an affront shows a *proper spirit!* This sort of proper spirit cannot be produced by God's Holy Spirit, for the fruits of that Spirit are "love, peace, long-suffering, and gentleness." When I am tempted to revenge myself on any one who has offended me, I am

* Rom. xii. 19. Col. iii. 13.

afraid that, instead of the Spirit of God being in me, I am rather led by the "evil spirit, that worketh in the children of disobedience;" for the Apostle John says: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." * If I attended to that advice of the Apostle,—"Let not the sun go down on your wrath;" that is to say, make up matters immediately, if you have had a quarrel with any one,—I should not be led into the sin of revenge. But by sullenly avoiding all reconciliation, and thinking over and over again on the injury done me, my anger grows into hatred and malice, and then produces the desire of revenge. When I calmly reflect upon it, how strange it appears that I, who have read my Bible, and believe it to be the word of God, should ever think of committing such a great sin,—a sin so positively forbidden in many places of Scripture! Jesus desires us to "love our enemies; to bless them that curse us; to do good to them that hate us; and to pray for them which despite-

* 1 John, iii. 10.

fully use us, and persecute us."* What, then, must He think of me, when He sees that I hate my enemies, and call them the same evil names they call me, and both do, and wish them, all the ill I can? Surely He will say, "that wicked child is none of mine; depart from me, for I know you not." He says, also, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." † This duty of forgiving injuries is commanded in all circumstances, however great and often repeated the offence may be. Not only are we desired to forgive our companion if he trespass against us *seven* times a day, but our Lord Jesus Christ told the Apostle Peter,—"I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven." ‡ So that whatever it is I am angry at, I never dare excuse myself, because God never will excuse me from the duty of forgiveness. But how difficult this is to my wicked heart! How impossible it seems, when my angry passions are roused, that I should ever be able to love those who offend me! But all things are possible

* Matt. v. 44. † Matt. vi. 15. ‡ Matt. xviii. 22.

with God. He can change this wicked heart of mine, and he has promised to do so, if I will ask Him. I will go and pray that He would enable me to be "kind and tender-hearted, and forgiving to others, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven me." * That He would take out of my heart that "hatred" that "stirreth up strifes," and put into it that "love" which "covereth all sins." †

* Eph. iv. 32. † Prov. x. 12.

MEDITATION IX.

ENVY.

"A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but envy the rottenness of the bones." * Envy is indeed a very painful, as well as a very wicked, passion. God has desired us, in whatever state we are, therewith to be content; but our evil hearts are always inclining us to envy those who are greater, or richer, or wiser, or more loved than ourselves. It is very foolish to envy those who are in a higher or more affluent situation than we are, because, if we believe that all things are directed by a wise God, we may be sure, that if He saw it would be better for us to be richer or greater than we are, He could easily make us so. And instead of envying those who are wiser, or who are more generally beloved than we are, it

* Prov. xiv. 30.

would be better for us to try to gain more wisdom ourselves, and to endeavour, by a kind and obliging behaviour to everybody, to gain more of their love and esteem. Nothing can be more unreasonable than the envy I sometimes feel. If a person loves or praises my brother, or my sister, or my companion, it does not take anything away from me. Perhaps they may love me as much, and praise me as much, when I am not present. And if they do not love me so well, I am afraid it must be because I do not deserve to be loved so much, since they could have no reason for preferring others to me, unless they were more amiable. Perhaps I know something against the character of that boy or girl I hear so much praised, which, if those who commend them knew of, they would change their praise into censure. Since they do not know of it, I cannot, of course, expect they should change their opinion; but, oh! if they knew how much I would like to tell them of it, if I were not afraid they would find out my motive, what a mean and envious creature they would *think* me! What cunning and invidious

methods I have sometimes taken to let them know of my companion's faults! And when these have come to their knowledge, what a wicked joy have I felt, to think that this boy or girl would no longer be so much loved as formerly! Surely I am too like wicked Cain, who was angry because his brother Abel's offering was accepted of the Lord, while his own was not.

My heart is so apt to deceive me, that sometimes, when I think I am acting very properly, I am, in reality, under the influence of this evil passion. When I am very anxious to get up in my class, or gain some prize at school, I work very diligently, which is quite right; but then I often feel that I am very envious of the boy or girl who is above me; and, sometimes, if one in particular has often got the better of me, I feel so angry at that person, that I would rather any one in the whole school succeeded in gaining the prize, or being at the head of the class, than this one. This emulation, or desire of excelling, which some people say is so necessary at school, can scarcely ever be indulged without leading to envy; and the Bible

says, "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work." * Let me then only be anxious to be a *good* scholar, without thinking whether I am *better* than this or the other one. To enable me to do this, I will pray to God to take away envy out of my heart; and to keep always in my mind the words of the Apostle Paul,—"Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another." †

* James, iii. 16. † Gal. v. 26.

MEDITATION X.

ON OBSTINACY.

"He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."* This is what the Bible says of obstinate people. But, although I often read it, how little do I attend to its precepts! When I once take it into my head to do anything, there is no possibility of persuading me to give it up; or, if I determine to do a thing in any particular way, all the advice in the world will not persuade me to change my plan, though older and wiser people may assure me it is a bad one; nay, sometimes even when my own reason and conscience tell me that they are in the right, my obstinacy makes me persist in my own way. All who know me must think me a fool for

* Prov. xxix. 1.

doing so; for the Bible says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise."* I generally find in the end it would have been much better for me to have taken the advice of my friends; but even when that is the case, and I have committed some blunder from following my own way, still my obstinacy prevents me from confessing I was in the wrong, and I continue to persist that I was quite right, and put the blame of my failure in my attempt upon something else. What a dreadful sin this is! It not only leads me to be disrespectful to my parents and teachers, but makes me tell a lie in the presence of the great God! for it is nothing less than a sinful lie to persist in saying I was in the right, when my conscience tells me I was not.

This obstinacy also makes me very sulky and unamiable as a companion. When I have had any dispute with my brother or sister, or playmate, instead of being anxious to be reconciled again, I often determine not to be the first to make concessions, but to hold out until

* Prov. xii. 15.

the other party make apologies to me; and yet I have often been warned that if I continue to do so, my friends will soon lose their kindness and regard for me, and that although my near relations and my young and thoughtless playfellows may at present put up with these humours, yet that when I grow up, no one will care to seek the friendship of one who shows that he thinks himself always right, and everybody else wrong. I will pray to God that He would enable me to be more like my Saviour Jesus Christ, who was "meek and gentle."

MEDITATION XI.

ON PRIDE.

"Be not wise in thine own eyes." "Though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly, but the proud He knoweth afar off." "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord."* How many times the Lord declares in his Holy Book His hatred of pride, His dislike of those who are wise in their own opinion; and yet, knowing this as I do, I still continue to be proud, and to think I know a great many things, and can judge what is right in many cases, better than other people. Pride is not only foolish and wicked in itself, but it is the cause of much of the folly and wickedness we commit. It is the pride of my heart that makes me so soon angry; that makes me so quarrelsome and

* Prov. iii. 7. Psalm cxxxviii. 6. Prov. xvi. 5.

revengeful, and envious, and obstinate. "Only by pride cometh contention." "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil; but the fool rageth and is confident."* If I did not think so much of myself, I should not be so ready to take offence at other people's conduct; I should not be always striving to obtain praise and esteem for myself at the expense of others; nor should I be so unwilling to follow the advices that are given me. "A fool despiseth his father's instruction, but he that regardeth reproof is prudent."† If I were more humble, I should always be disposed to be contented with my situation in life, without envying those who are richer and more nobly born: I should be more patient when my friends find fault with me, instead of being angry whenever they tell me I have any faults. I am so self-conceited that I scarcely believe I can ever be in the wrong; and so unwilling to humble myself in any way, that even when I am conscious I am in the wrong, I cannot bring myself to confess it. Nay, so foolish am I as sometimes even to exalt myself against

* Prov. xiii. 10. Ibid. xiv. 16. † Prov. xv. 5.

God, by feeling angry when I am told that He considers me a sinner. When I hear the clergyman in church say, that all men are by nature sinful and corrupt, or when my teacher tells me that I am a wicked child, and can only hope for pardon through the atonement and merits of my Saviour, my evil and rebellious heart feels angry at the accusation, and declares that I am not a sinner, and that as I never do anything that is very wicked, nobody has any right to call me a sinner.

And is it possible that the pride of my heart should ever thus deceive me, who have read my Bible? Have I not read that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;"* that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked?"† I cannot be so ignorant as to suppose that none are sinners, but those who rob or murder their fellow-creatures. I have no temptation to rob or murder any one; but I have within me the same evil passions of hatred, and envy, and covetousness, that lead robbers and murderers *to* commit those horrid crimes which bring

* Gen. viii. 21. † Jer. xvii. .

them to an untimely end. The wise King Solomon says, that "every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but the Lord pondereth the hearts." * It is not our actions only, but the thoughts and intentions of our hearts that the Lord observes; and I am sure, when he looks on mine, He must indeed think me a sinner. Let me therefore go and pray to Him that He would "create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me;" that I may no more be filled with so much wicked pride, which is hurtful to my progress both in knowledge and in holiness; for Solomon says, "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him." †

* Prov. xxi. 2. † Ibid. xxvi. 12.

MEDITATION XII.

ON VANITY.

"All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth;"* and so shall this frail and perishing body of mine, about which I now take so much trouble. Though I now spend hours in decking and adorning it, yet, in a few years, it will be put away out of sight, and become food for reptiles. And should I then be vain of my person! Should I spend my time and thoughts in ornamenting that which will soon be a repast for the worms! And what have I to be vain of? I did not make this body myself;—I have no merit in it. God gave me a body as it pleased Him. And I have as little reason to be vain of my fine

* Isaiah, xl. 6, 7.

clothes, as it was God who gave my parents that money which enabled them to buy such things for me. Many a wicked and disagreeable child is dressed in fine clothes, and many a pious and amiable boy and girl is clothed in mean and poor garments. It is right I should be careful to keep my person neat and clean; but let me not be too anxious about adorning it; nor ever forget that "dust I am, and unto dust I must return."

But it is not of my person, nor of my clothes, only, that I am apt to be vain; I sometimes pride myself on being a little above others in station, and put on many conceited airs on this account. But who made me to differ from another? Was it not the great and good God who gave me everything I possess? And what must He think of me, when, instead of thanking Him for this blessing, and trying to express my gratitude for it, by being kind and liberal to my poor brethren of mankind, I treat those who are inferior to myself with contempt and insolence; forgetting that they are His creatures, and that it was He who put them in that low condition! Let me call to mind what God

says of such conduct in His own Book:—"Whoso mocketh the poor, reproacheth his Maker."* And when I am amongst my companions, how anxious am I to obtain the notice of those whose parents are rich, or great! How civil and obliging am I to them; and how much more eager to secure their approbation than that of others who are inferior to them in rank or consequence, though these others should be more pious and amiable! God reproveth this sort of partiality by the mouth of His Apostle James:—"If there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here, in a good place; and say to the poor, stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?"† That is, judges who estimate others according to their own selfish and evil thoughts, and not according to the real worth of those people about whom they form a judgment.

* Prov. xvii. 5. † James, ii. 2, 3, 4.

If I may neither be vain of my personal appearance, nor of my station in society, may I then be vain of my learning or acquirements? No, surely; for they, too, are the gift of God. From Him I have received not only those advantages of education which have been bestowed upon me, but those powers of mind which enable me to understand the instructions given to me, and that memory by which I retain all I learn. How many are the gifts of my gracious God, and what a poor return I make for them! Well might it be said to me, "What hast thou, that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"* I am indeed foolishly vain-glorious of these things! How fond am I, at all times, of displaying my knowledge! And how my foolish heart throbs with vanity, when I hear myself praised! I am afraid I love the praise of man more than the approbation of God; for I labour much more diligently to obtain it. Let me pray to my Heavenly Father, that He would enable me to devote His gifts to His glory, instead

* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

of my own vanity; that He would help me to "glorify Him in my body, and in my spirit, which are God's:"* "being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." †

* 1 Cor. vi. 20. † Col. i. 10.

MEDITATION XIII.

ON SELFISHNESS.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."* Such is the rule the Lord Jesus Christ has given for our conduct towards those amongst whom we live. By our neighbour, as He tells us in the parable of the good Samaritan, He means any of our brethren of mankind, whom Providence puts in our way. So that this rule not only extends to our relations and acquaintance, but to all our fellow-creatures, with whom we have anything to do. We are thus taught to consider ourselves as part of the great family of God, and are commanded to live in brotherly kindness and charity with them all; not seeking our own benefit or comfort alone, but endeavouring, as much as in us lies, to promote the happiness and welfare of all around us. Such is the law of God. How ill does my conduct

* Matt. xxii. 39.

agree with it! At home and at school, at work and at play, it is always my own convenience and pleasure that I am concerned about. When there is any troublesome or tedious task to be performed, I always hope that I may not be the one chosen to perform it; when there is any pleasure to be enjoyed, I am most anxious that it may fall to my share, without considering whether or not some one else has a better title to it. Nay, even when I am conscious it is not my turn to accompany my parents somewhere, or enjoy such or such an amusement, I sometimes grumble, and feel discontented, that the pleasure should fall to another's share. When anything is divided amongst my companions and me, how anxious am I to secure an equal, and sometimes even a better, portion for myself! And if I am satisfied with my own share, I feel quite indifferent how others may fare. When anything happens, my first thought always is, how this will affect myself; if I feel no inconvenience from it, I am not much concerned, however others may suffer; and if, on the contrary, it causes me any pain *or trouble,* I care not how useful or advan-

tageous it may be to others. How unlike this is to the example set by our blessed Lord, while on earth! How different from the conduct of His holy disciples! What toils and hardships they endured for the benefit of their brethren of mankind! How little they thought of their own comfort, or happiness, or life, while engaged in spreading abroad the glad tidings of the Gospel! St. Paul endeavoured, as far as was consistent with God's glory, to "please all men in all things; not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many."* And God, through him, gives us this command: "Look not every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others."† Let me, then, pray to God, that He would take this selfishness out of my heart, by the "washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" that He would bestow on me that love to my brethren, which all who are really the disciples of Christ possess; that he would enable me continually to act under the influence of that "charity," which "doth not behave itself unseemly," and "seeketh not its own."‡

* 1 Cor. x. 33. † Phil. ii 4. ‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

MEDITATION XIV.

ON PEEVISHNESS AND DISCONTENT.

"Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer."* When I read in the Bible how discontented and ungrateful the children of Israel were, notwithstanding all the blessings God bestowed upon them, I often wonder how the Almighty had so much patience with such sinful creatures. But, alas! I forget what the Apostle Paul tells us, that "all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition."† How frequently does my own conduct show that I possess the same murmuring and discontented spirit I so much condemn in them! How easily am I put out of humour! How often do I find fault with the persons and things

* 1 Cor. x. 10. † Ibid. ver. 11.

about me! If my brothers, or sisters, or companions, choose to take their own way, in opposition to mine, — if my parents do not give me everything I wish, — unless, in short, every one around me does exactly as I please, — I immediately become peevish and sulky, and vent my ill-humour on all who come near me; or if I dare not do this, remain sullen and displeased for a whole day. Then, if anything occurs that I do not like, — if I am disappointed of a pleasure, or have a disagreeable task imposed upon me, — if I want what I see others enjoy, or suffer that to which they are not exposed, — I am discontented, and dissatisfied with my condition; and sometimes murmur and complain, as if I were the most unhappy creature upon earth. May I not, then, wonder at the goodness and long-suffering of God towards myself, who thus ungratefully murmur against Him, notwithstanding all the good things He has bestowed upon me? All murmuring, whatsoever, is murmuring against God; because, as He disposes of us according to His pleasure, it is He who has ordered those things, in our

lot, we so much complain of. God himself tells us: "See now that I, even I, am He; there is no God with me; I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal."* So that whether we are in health or sickness, in affluence or poverty, in a comfortable or disagreeable situation, we are thus placed by our Heavenly Father. And does He permit us to murmur when we have not those pleasures, or luxuries, or conveniences, we wish for? No; He tells us, by the mouth of His Apostle Paul, that "having food and raiment, we should be therewith content."† And how much reason have I to be contented, when I think how many poor creatures there are who have nothing to eat, and scarcely clothes enough to cover themselves. And what is it but the good pleasure of God that causes me thus to differ from them! If I were to give a child a nice play-thing, and if, instead of enjoying it, he began to cry because it was not bigger, or better, should I not be angry at the silly child, and feel inclined to take it away from him? And when the Lord sees

* *Deut.* xxxii. 39. † 1 Tim. vi. 8.

me peevish about trifles, and murmuring at my parents, my companions, and my situation, will He not think me a wicked and foolish child? And might He not justly say, in anger, "Since that sinful child is so ungrateful for all the blessings I have bestowed upon him, I will take away his parents, and his friends, and all his comforts, and make him a little wandering and hungry beggar?" Yes, with justice He might; but "His ways are not as our ways," for "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness."* And shall I continue wilfully to offend this gracious and merciful God, who is so patient with a discontented and rebellious child? Oh no! I will go and pray that He would forgive this, and all my other sins, for Christ's sake; and beg Him to bestow on me, by his Holy Spirit, that "godliness," which, "with contentment, is great gain." †

* Joel, ii. 13. † 1 Tim. vi. 6.

MEDITATION XV.

ON FALSEHOOD.

"Lying lips are abomination to the Lord."* What a fearful proof God gave of His hatred of falsehood, when He struck dead, first Ananias, and then Sapphira, for telling a lie about the price for which they sold their possession!† If I always recollected this sad and true story, I surely never should venture to say what is not true. But, alas! when my evil and corrupt heart prompts me to tell a lie, I do not then think either of God, or His holy Book; but only of escaping the anger of my parents or teachers, by concealing the truth from their knowledge. And how often has the attempt to do so been unsuccessful! How often are liars detected, and then they are punished for two faults instead of one!

* *Prov.* xii. 22. † Acts, v. 1—11.

And even if I succeed in deceiving those around me, there is One whom I can never deceive: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." "There is no darkness where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."* And dare I, to escape the anger of any of my fellow-creatures, displease the great God of heaven, who could, if He chose, strike me dead in a moment, while the lie is on my lips! The advice of our blessed Saviour is very different from this. He tells us that we must obey the command of God, even if we should lose our lives by so doing:—"Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear; fear Him which, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him."† And we are told that "he that speaketh lies shall not escape;"‡ for "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone."§ Should I, then, to escape a punish-

* Prov. xv. 3.—Job, xxxiv. 22. † Luke, xii. 4, 5.
‡ Prov. xix. 5. § Rev. xxi. 8.

ment which I justly deserve, dare to draw upon myself the wrath of Almighty God, and run the risk of being plunged into everlasting misery? O no, let me undergo the most severe correction, or be deprived of the most esteemed enjoyment, rather than "do this great evil, and sin against God."

But there are other ways of deceiving besides that of telling a direct lie. We may, by concealing some part of the truth, or by misrepresenting it, deceive people as much as if we had told them something false. How often have I thus imposed upon those with whom I have to do! How often have I exaggerated some things, and softened down others, till they suited my own purpose! This may deceive my fellow-creatures, — nay, it has sometimes, for a time, even deceived myself, and made me suppose I was not telling a lie; but God cannot be deceived; He listens not merely to the words, but "looketh on the heart;" and if He there sees any wish to deceive, — any desire that the person we speak to should believe or understand something different from the real truth,—then He reckons

that boy or girl, whose heart has this deceitful intention, as a liar.

Nor should people even venture to indulge much in that sort of joking, or telling stories that are not true, for amusement, because it is very nearly akin to lying; and where a habit of doing so is acquired, it is sometimes very hurtful both to the person who does it, and to those with whom he associates. God says to us, in His book, "Speak ye every man truth to his neighbour."* And one should think it would not be difficult to obey this command; but our corrupt nature feels it very difficult to keep any of God's commandments; I will therefore go and pray to God, that he would send the "Spirit of truth" into my heart, that He may "guide me into all truth."†

* Zech. viii. 16. † John, xvi. 13.

MEDITATION XVI.

ON IMPATIENCE.

"Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him." * How foolish is this impatience in which I sometimes indulge! If things do not happen exactly as I expect or wish them,—or if things are not done at the very time and in the very manner I desire, how much I am irritated, and put out of temper! When I am engaged in any favourite scheme, how anxious and restless I am about it; how eager to get on with it; and how impatient I am of every interruption! I cannot bear to leave off my employment, though called to do something more necessary, from the haste I am in to have it finished. And how very trifling in themselves those plans and occupations some-

* Prov. xxix. 20.

times are, about which I give myself so much trouble!

When I am suffering under any painful or disagreeable circumstances, how impatient I am to have them removed! Even when I am convinced that impatience will do no good, nor get me out of my trials or difficulties one moment sooner, my foolish and corrupt heart still continues to fret and to complain. How sinful this is! If the trouble I am in is brought on by my own folly, it is fit that I should be allowed to suffer from it for a while, in order that my own backslidings may correct me, and be made the means of teaching me to avoid in future what has caused me so much trouble. If, on the other hand, my distress comes from God, I may be sure it is sent for some good purpose, and should therefore endeavour to be resigned to bear it, and quietly wait until He sees fit to remove it. I should "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." *

Sometimes my impatient temper breaks out on very trifling occasions. If, when I am

* Psalm xxxvii. 7.

explaining any thing, others do not immediately understand me,—or if I am hearing my brothers, or sisters, or companions, repeat their lessons, and they are stupid or inattentive, instead of patiently endeavouring to make them comprehend the matter, — I get angry with them, and can scarcely refrain from calling them contemptuous names. I have hitherto been guilty of the sad mistake of thinking that impatience is not a fault for which I need be very sorry, but that it is only a weakness, or a folly. But I find it is dangerous to think lightly of any fault; for this impatience has often betrayed me into the sins of anger and discontent, and many others. I will, therefore, pray to my Heavenly Father, that he would, for Christ's sake, enable me to curb my impatient temper, and make me often remember the advice of the Apostle James,— "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." *

* James, i. 19

MEDITATION XVII.

ON SATIRE, UNCHARITABLENESS, AND FOOLISH TATTLING.

"Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour."* Is this the character and disposition one must possess, in order to be fit for the enjoyment of Heaven? Alas! how do I come short in this, as in everything else. How often do I criticise, and find fault with, my absent acquaintance! How ready am I to believe and repeat every story I hear to their disadvantage! And is not this backbiting with my tongue? Is not this taking up a reproach against my neighbour? "Speak not evil one of another, brethren,"† says the Apostle James; but how

* Psalm xv. 1—3. † James, iv. 11.

little is his advice attended to. How often, for my own amusement, do I encourage satire and evil-speaking in others; and how often, for the sake of being thought witty and clever, do I indulge in it myself. Whatever other people may think of such conversation, the wise king, Solomon, said, "He that uttereth slander is a fool."* When I take pleasure in hearing something to the disadvantage of another, whom do I resemble in disposition? No other than the devil, who delights to witness the folly and wickedness of mankind. And with this disposition in me, can I be fit to dwell in God's holy hill? Ah! no; I am fitter for the society in that horrid place where evil spirits dwell, — "hateful, and hating one another." How much need then have I to pray for a new heart, and a right spirit.

Sometimes, without feeling any malice in my heart against the parties concerned, I help to circulate evil reports, by repeating them out of mere carelessness, or want of something to say. But what evil consequences this thought-

* Prov. x. 18.

lessness may produce! These are, certainly, some of those "idle words," of which we must, one day, render an account. What a painful thought it would be to me, if I found that any one had been seriously injured through a report which I helped to spread! Much evil may also be done by a foolish tattling about our neighbour's concerns. "A tale-bearer revealeth secrets;" "a whisperer separateth chief friends."* It is mean and silly to repeat in one house all that I have heard and seen in another; and it is very unbecoming in me to find fault with other people's way of acting, since it is impossible I can know their motives, or understand their concerns. I need not think it any sign of my superior wisdom, for Solomon says, "Every fool will be meddling."† Well may the Apostle James say, that "the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity, an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."‡ How much need have we to watch over our conversation, that "no corrupt communication may proceed out of our mouths, but that which is good to the use of

* Prov. xi. 13.—xvi. 28. † Prov. xx. 3.
‡ James, iii. 8.

edifying!"* I will go and pray to God to bestow upon me more watchfulness in this respect; I will beg Him, for Christ's sake, to enable me to govern my tongue, and to make my conversation be such as "becometh the gospel of Christ."†

* Eph. iv. 29. † Phil. i. 27.

MEDITATION XVIII.

ON TALKING LIGHTLY OF SERIOUS THINGS.

"God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him."* With what awe and veneration should we use God's holy name, and how reverently should we talk of every thing belonging to Him! Yet how often do wicked men, and wicked children too, dishonour His holy name, and take it in vain. Although, by the grace of God, and the watchful care of my parents, I am not permitted to swear and to curse, as some ignorant and sinful children do,—yet, I fear, I am guilty of the sin of profaning God's name. Talking lightly of the word, or the ordinances of God, is profaneness in His sight. How sinful, then, is it to quote the Scriptures in the midst of laughter and

* Psalm lxxxix. 7.

joking; and to give a ludicrous meaning to words that signify something solemn or important! Or to imitate the language of the Bible in a jesting manner; or mention any of the characters or incidents in it, in a light or irreverent way! How much it must displease God, when anything connected with His worship is made the subject of a jest! When the modes in which we address the Almighty, and make our solemn approaches to Him, are held up to ridicule, or carelessly and slightingly spoken of! And how very offensive it must be in God's sight, when any of His pious ministers or people are ridiculed or abused; when any harmless peculiarities they may have are exposed to public notice, for the purpose of being laughed at or reviled! The Lord showed His abhorrence of this, in the striking judgment He inflicted on the children, who said to the prophet Elisha, "Go up, thou bald head."* And though He does not now show His anger against people who mock his saints, by sending bears to tear them in pieces,—yet as with Him there is "no variableness nor shadow of turn-

* 2 Kings, ii. 23.

ing," we must suppose this sin is as hateful to Him now as it was then. How careful, then, should I be to avoid it myself, and to check it in others! God Himself says, by the mouth of His servant, "let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him."* But how little awe must that person have of the Almighty, who can permit himself to talk irreverently of "God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, or works!" Oh! let me pray to be kept from this sin; and beg my Heavenly Father to enable me always to keep in mind the advice of the wise man: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore, let thy words be few."†

* Psalm xxxiii. 8. † Eccles. v. 2.

MEDITATION XIX.

ON CARELESSNESS IN CHURCH.

"How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord."* Thus did the holy saints of old feel towards the place where they worshipped the Lord; and, in all ages, those who have loved God have delighted to meet together to worship Him. Ah! how different their feelings from mine! So far from longing for this, I often weary when in church, and am glad when the time arrives for returning home. I sometimes pretend to pray to Him, without thinking of the meaning of a single word I am uttering; I sing His praises with the same unconcern; and when His appointed servant begins to preach the glad tidings of the gospel, I scarcely think it necessary to listen to him. I generally sit

* Psalm lxxxiv. 1, 2.

and think on something I will do when I return home, or something I mean to do next day; nay, I am even sometimes so silly as to amuse myself with observing the dress and behaviour of those who are present. And all this is done in the presence of the great God, who made me, and gave me all I possess! His eyes are upon me the whole time, beholding every foolish thought that comes into my mind. How little reverence must I have for the Lord, when I can thus insult Him to His face. "Shall not His excellency make you afraid, and His dread fall upon you?" * says Job. Well may I fear He will punish me for this sin, if I do not earnestly beg for grace to repent and amend it. Our Saviour says, "Take heed how ye hear; for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." † Many people would be glad to have the privilege of attending public worship, and hearing the gospel preached, which I treat as a thing of so little value; if I continue to despise so great an advantage,

* Job, xiii. 11. † Luke, viii. 18.

God may deprive me of it altogether. Oh! how dreadful this would be! What would it avail me to be rich, or great, or esteemed among men, — nay, what would it avail me, if I gained the whole world, and lost my own soul? And how can I expect ever to become a child of God, if I neglect the means of grace He has appointed? If all the people who listened to the preaching of the Apostles had been as careless as I am, instead of thousands at a time being added to the church, there would not have been a single one. Let me then go and pray to God, that, for Christ's sake, He would enable me to behave myself more wisely, and would give me such a constant recollection of His presence, that I may be afraid and ashamed to let my thoughts wander on vanity, as they have hitherto done. And I will also repeat to myself, every time I am going to church, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God; and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil." *

* Eccles. v. 1.

MEDITATION XX.

ON NEGLECT OF, OR CARELESSNESS AT, PRAYER.

"The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever."* How dreadful is the fate of those who live and die in the neglect of prayer. And well do they deserve to be cast off, who commit this great sin. Those who are ungrateful to their fellow-creatures are hated and despised by all; but how much greater wickedness is it to be ungrateful to God! To receive many and great blessings from Him every day, without thanking Him for them, or once thinking from whom they come! Oh! let no circumstance whatever prevent me from praying to my God every day; lest, by indulging frequent carelessness, I should, at last,

*1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

come to forsake Him altogether, and be cast off by Him for ever.

But though I do not forget to offer up my prayers, yet if I repeat them in a careless or formal manner, I then, in reality, neglect to pray. To be engaged in prayer, is not merely to kneel down and repeat a form of sound words; it is to have the mind impressed with the recollection that God is present with us, listening to every word we say; and to have the heart and thoughts devoutly lifted up to Him; praising Him because He is great and glorious; thanking Him, because He is merciful and kind; confessing that we are worthless and sinful creatures; and petitioning him, for Christ's sake, to grant us all those things that we need. What will it avail us to do all this with our lips, if we do it not also with our hearts? God mentions this as one of the heinous sins of the children of Israel: "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me."* I must pray to be kept from this carelessness, for it is

* Isaiah, xxix. 13.

a mockery of God. I must endeavour always to recollect that I am speaking to God, and asking Him for such things as I need. If I wished my father, or mother, or any earthly friend, to give me something I desired, I would not speak to them in the careless and indifferent manner in which I sometimes speak to the Almighty God. What a sinful heart this shows! The Lord condescends to let a child speak to Him, and promises to listen to me; and yet, when I come into His presence, I treat Him with less reverence than I would treat a fellow-creature.

I must also take care with what temper or frame of mind I come into the Lord's presence, and offer up my prayers to Him. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."* If I kneel down to pray while my heart is full of anger, or revenge, or pride, or envy,—if I have been telling a lie, or using deceit of any kind,—if I have been idle or careless, peevish or obstinate, disobedient or rude to my parents or teachers,—and do not feel sorry for these faults, or, at least, desire to

* Psalm lxvi. 18.

be grieved for them,—God will not receive my prayer. Our Lord Jesus Christ says, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."* So that if I have offended any one, I must go and confess my faults, and ask their forgiveness; or if any one has offended me, and I have been angry with them, I must forgive, and be reconciled to them, and not bring a malicious heart into the presence of the God of mercy and forgiveness.

All the pious people we read of were much employed in prayer. "Evening, and morning, and at noon will I pray, and cry aloud."† "Seven times a day do I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments."‡ Thus did holy David; besides praying to God at stated times, he frequently, in the course of the day, lifted up his heart to God, acknowledging the many mercies he received from Him. I must endeavour to follow the example of those, who

* Matt. v. 23, 24. † Psalm lv. 17. ‡ Psalm cxix. 164.

through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises. But my sinful heart often feels backward and averse from the duty of prayer. I will therefore go and ask my Heavenly Father, for Christ's sake, to pour out upon me the "spirit of grace and of supplication."*

* Zech. xii. 10.

MEDITATION XXI.

ON NEGLECT OF, OR CARELESSNESS IN, READING THE BIBLE.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."* How excellent is the Bible! That holy book written by God himself! "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."† What a terrible situation we should have been in, if God, in His infinite kindness, had not given us the instructions contained in this book. When we saw people carried away to the dark and cold grave, without knowing what was to become of

* Psalm xix. 7, 8. † 2 Peter, i. 21.

them afterwards, how we should have trembled when we fancied ourselves near death! But life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel. This valuable book tells us how we may be safe and comfortable here, and perfectly happy through all eternity. If there were any book that told men how they might get a large estate, and be certain of living a long time to enjoy it, how much would this book be sought after; and how often and carefully it would be read! How anxious would people be to have every word of it explained; and how fearful lest they should mistake the meaning of any part of it! The Bible tells us how we may obtain an inheritance, "incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" but, alas! we do not value it so much as we should a book that told us how we might be made rich in this world's goods. How carelessly do I sometimes read the Bible: merely looking at the words, while my mind is wandering upon something very different from what I am reading about! When I come to any passage I do not understand, instead of being anxious to have it explained to me, I pass

it over with great indifference, or, at least, content myself with thinking, "I shall ask the meaning of this some other time." When I read the scriptures in this careless and formal way, I may, to be sure, appear to men to read them; my parents or teachers may think that I am very regular and attentive in the discharge of this duty, if they see the Bible in my hands at stated times; but God, who looketh on the heart, sees that I neglect His holy word altogether. He commands us not only to *read* the scriptures, but to "*search* the scriptures;" like a person, who having lost something, seeks diligently till he find it.

But even to read the Bible attentively, and to remember the truths it contains, will be of little use to me, unless I endeavour to regulate my conduct according to its directions. The Psalmist says, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."* But if I refuse to walk in the path it points out, it will avail me nothing. If I know that God hates sin, and I yet continue to love it;—that there is but one way of being reconciled to God, and

* Psalm cxix. 105.

yet I give myself no concern about my Saviour; —that God has promised to renew our sinful hearts by His Spirit, and yet I neglect to ask the assistance of the Holy Spirit;—then all this knowledge which I have acquired, instead of doing me any good, will rise up in judgment against me: and I shall fall into the condemnation of that wicked servant, who knew his Lord's will, and did it not. Let me then take heed how I use this sacred book, since it will either be to me the savour of "life unto life," or of "death unto death." Let me pray to my gracious God that He would, for Christ's sake, "open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of His law."

MEDITATION XXII.

ON INDOLENCE.

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. And, lo! it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep."* What a sinful thing is indolence! When God has given us various faculties of mind and body, that we may use them to His glory, how displeased must He be, when He sees us letting these faculties remain idle, as if we despised His gifts! How lazy and slothful I sometimes am. In the morning I prefer lying in my bed, to getting up, and devoting

* Prov. xxiv. 30—33.

myself to the Lord, at His throne of grace; and in this way I have sometimes scarcely time to say a few words of prayer before breakfast. "As the door turneth upon its hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed."* Sometimes I spend hours in doing nothing; or, by my sluggish way of setting about my business, spend twice as much time as is necessary at every employment. When the day comes to an end, I often find that I have not done the one half of what I ought to have done; and thus everything gets into confusion.

This is a sin which is severely punished even in this world. "The sluggard will not plough, by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing." "Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty:" "drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."† If I continue to indulge habits of indolence, they may remain with me through life, and make me poor and unhappy. It is foolish to think that it is of little consequence whether I am busy at my lessons or not; because, if I indulge my corrupt heart in its love of ease and indolence, it will

* Prov. xxvi. 14. † Prov. xx. 4, 13; xxiii. 21.

be very difficult for me to rouse myself to exertion when I am grown up, and need to be actively employed; and activity is absolutely necessary, whether we need to labour for our support or not; for "he that is slothful is brother to him that is a great waster."* Many a rich man has been brought to poverty, because he was so indolent he could not be at the trouble to look after his affairs. Let me then pray to my Heavenly Father, for Christ's sake, to enable me to be active and industrious; "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."†

* Prov. xviii. 9. † Rom. xii. 11.

MEDITATION XXIII.

ON CARELESSNESS AND NEGLECT OF DUTY.

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word."* Alas! how little heed do I take to my ways! How carelessly, and with how little thought, do I live day after day! Scarcely a day passes in which I do not neglect or forget some part of my duty. I am often so bent upon my amusements that I hurry over my lessons in a careless manner; and sometimes, while I am learning them, my thoughts are wandering so much on something else, that though I may be able to repeat the words, I do not understand the meaning of a single sentence. By being thus careless of what I am about, I not only do many things in a negligent and imperfect manner, but often

* Psalm cxix. 9.

entirely forget to do things I have been desired to do. I sometimes think that this is not a very great fault, and that I cannot help forgetting many things; but when we read of the sad consequences of carelessness, we should be warned against thinking lightly of it. Pharaoh's butler "did not remember Joseph, but forgat him;"* and this forgetfulness caused poor Joseph to remain two full years longer in prison. Forgetfulness proceeds from not having our minds fixed on those things on which they ought to be fixed. If, when I am at my studies, I thought of nothing but my studies; if I remembered how necessary they are, and how anxious my parents are that I should attend diligently to them, I never could forget any one of them. And if I were always to bear in mind how much my kind parents have done for me, and how careful I ought to be to show my gratitude for this kindness, by attending to everything they say to me, I should not so often forget to do what they desire me; or require to be told the same thing so many times over. So that when I attempt

* Genesis, xl. 23.

to excuse myself for neglecting any duty, by saying that I quite forgot it, I speak in a foolish and thoughtless manner; for this forgetfulness is in itself a great offence. If any one reprcached Pharaoh's butler for his neglect of Joseph, would they be satisfied with the excuse, that he forgot him? No: they would say to him, "It was very ungrateful in you to forget one to whom you owed so much; if you had felt a proper degree of gratitude towards him, his case would not have slipped out of your memory." If, then, I forget my devotions, or forget my studies or other duties, it shows a want of gratitude to God and to my parents. Let me, then, pray for assistance against this careless spirit; let me beg of God, for Christ's sake, to impress me more deeply with gratitude towards Him, and all the kind friends He has given me; to enable me always to think seriously on what I am about; that I may "ponder the path of my feet, and let all my ways be established."*

* Prov. iv. 26.

MEDITATION XXIV.

ON SETTING THE HEART TOO KEENLY ON A FAVOURITE OBJECT.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."* "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."† Such are the commandments which the Lord gives us by the mouth of His holy apostles. I have often read them, and know that they are holy, and just, and true; but my evil heart continually leads me to break them. I love the world, and the things that are in the world, very much. I set the greater share of my affections on things that are on the earth, and a very small portion on those above. Nay, I have sometimes reason to doubt whether I have any affection for spiritual things, for they

* 1 John, ii. 15. † Col. iii. 2.

are often such a weariness to me, while the things of this world always interest and delight me. When there is any new object I wish to obtain, with what eagerness do I pursue it! When I am carrying on any scheme of my own, how diligent I am; how patiently do I submit to trouble and fatigue, and how joyfully do I look forward to the completion of my wishes! And all the while I am so bent upon this, my studies, and all my duties, appear quite secondary to it; and though I may not neglect them altogether, yet I am glad to get them over, and consider them as interruptions to my favourite employment. In short, the pursuit of the present time, whatever this may be, engrosses my whole thoughts and affections; and would probably engross the whole of my time too, if my time were at my own disposal. And what sort of object is it which thus engrosses me, to which I thus devote every faculty of mind and body? Is it the salvation of my immortal soul? Is it anything that can show forth the glory of God, or contribute to the good of mankind, such as instructing the ignorant, feeding the hungry, or clothing the naked?

Ah! no; it is generally some scheme of mere amusement; something for my own gratification; or something by which I expect to gain praise or profit. And what does the word of truth say of those who thus make some worldly object their chief good? "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* Am I then a lover of pleasure, more than a lover of God? Oh! let me earnestly endeavour to have my character reversed. God is the chief delight of all His saints; and it is because they love Him so much, that they look forward with joy to the time when they shall be for ever with Him. If I do not learn to love God, above everything else, while I am here, I shall not be fit to enjoy the happiness of heaven; for it could be no pleasure to be for ever in the company of one whom we did not love. But I feel that I cannot love God, merely by wishing to love Him; nor can I wean my heart from the trifles and vanities of this world, merely by knowing that it is right I should do so. My carnal mind is by nature "enmity against God;" and they that are in

* 1 John, ii. 15.

the flesh do all, by nature, "mind the things of the flesh." Since the Bible says, that "to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace,"* I should earnestly pray that God would "create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me," that I may no longer set my heart so keenly upon any earthly object; but remember that "one thing is needful;" and choose, without delay, that better part that shall not be taken away from me. I know that God does not bid me relinquish the pursuit of any object that is in itself harmless, and of which my parents approve; but He commands me so to moderate my desires in regard to it, as to prevent it from occupying the chief place in my affections. This proper regulation of my will and affections is a duty in which I especially need constant assistance; for so weak and corrupt are our hearts, that even the very employments which God commands are sometimes made occasions of sin, by carrying our thoughts away from Him. I will, therefore, beseech the Lord, for Christ's sake, to enable me to

* Rom. viii. 6.

"keep my heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life;"* and to give His Holy Spirit to me, that I may not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of my mind, that I "may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."†

* Prov. iv. 23. † Rom. xii. 2.

MEDITATION XXV.

ON IMPROPER THOUGHTS OR EXPRESSIONS.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."* Our fellow-creatures may judge of our outward conduct; for when we commit any sinful action, they can see or hear of it; but the sins of our hearts and thoughts are known to God only. If, then, while I am careful about my actions, I take no care about my thoughts, it is evident that I am more concerned to please men, than to please God.

How careful ought I to be to keep my thoughts pure and clean! If impurity is long indulged in the heart, it will, in due time, tinge the words and the actions. I should not only be cautious to shun all filthy words and expressions, all conversation on improper subjects, and everything that at all borders on

* Matt. v. 8.

indelicate conversation; but I should, on all occasions, discountenance the same in others. I must shun the company of those who indulge in such sinful and impure discourse, for "evil communications corrupt good manners." If we accustom ourselves to listen to improper language, our delicacy is soon lost; for our "hearts wax gross," and our ears become "dull of hearing." If we did not know that the heart of man is naturally disposed to all evil, we should wonder what temptation there can be to commit this sin; for filthy conversation is offensive both to God and men; at least, none but the sinful and impure among mankind can relish improper language. Neither is it a sin into which one can be betrayed unawares; for we know well enough, before we say it, whether a word, or expression, or subject of discourse, is proper or improper. If, at any time, I let fall an expression, or pass a joke, which I would not venture to do if any of my parents, or most esteemed friends, were present, or converse with others upon a subject which we should immediately drop if our parents or older

friends entered the room, I may then be quite sure there is something improper in such conversation. Let me then pray to the God of holiness and purity, to cleanse my heart by "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" and, for Christ's sake, to enable me to hate everything that is filthy and impure; that "no corrupt communication may proceed out of my mouth;" * "neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient." †

* Eph. iv. 29. † Ibid. v. 4.

MEDITATION XXVI.

ON SICKNESS.

"All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field."* This body, which was lately so strong and healthy, the Lord has been pleased to afflict with sickness. Our times are wholly in His hands, and every dispensation comes directly from Him; so that while we may talk of having caught cold, or infection, or of having received a hurt, we must never forget that the cold, or infection, or hurt, was permitted by God, for some wise and gracious purpose. How sinful, then, it is to murmur and be discontented, when one is sick! And how foolish is it also, since it only adds to our sufferings! The Lord could, if He pleased, remove our sickness in a moment; but He allows it to continue just so long as He thinks good for us. We should, therefore,

* Isaiah, xl. 6.

endeavour to bear it with patience. Alas! how often I forget all this! How impatient I sometimes am! And how often do I speak crossly and peevishly to those about me, notwithstanding all the care and attention they bestow upon me! How foolish and how ungrateful is this, to force them to bear with my peevishness and ill-humour, in addition to all the trouble I must necessarily give them! How childishly do I sometimes complain of the prescribed remedies, and actually feel angry at those who insist upon my taking them, as if they did so merely to vex and disturb me! And when they refuse to give me anything I wish, instead of being satisfied when told it would do me harm, I fret at the disappointment, and show that I think my friends care very little for my comfort. How different ought my conduct to be from all this! How grateful should I be to my friends for all their kindness; and how thankful that God has placed me in a situation where I can obtain those advices and remedies that may be made instrumental to my recovery! How many poor children are, at this moment, in sickness and pain, who have no friends to

nurse them, no medicine to cure them, who scarcely have even food to nourish them, or clothes to cover them! How many things have I to alleviate my distress, which they are totally without! Oh, let me recollect this, when I am inclined to be peevish or ill-natured, and let me inwardly beg of God to keep me from being so ungrateful to Him and to my friends.

But though we are forbidden to murmur when we are ill, the Lord is not angry at those groans which are wrung from us by pain. No chastening for the present is joyous but grievous; and it is natural and allowable in us, to wish for the removal of our trouble. I will, therefore, pray to God to bless those remedies that are used for my recovery; and I will ask my friends to pray for me also. When Hezekiah prayed to the Lord to heal his sickness, the Lord granted his request.

Although this illness prevents me from performing my devotions in my customary way, yet it need not prevent me from lifting up my heart and thoughts to God in prayer. If I am not able to read the Bible myself, I may

get some one to read it to me; or, if this be not found expedient, I may think over, or repeat to myself, some of the verses I have learnt, or some of my hymns. If the heart is disposed to think of God, He will pardon the imperfection of our prayers and praises; and will, for Christ's sake, receive and accept of them, though they should be such as to appear quite confused and unintelligible to our fellow-creatures.

But though the Lord sometimes answers the prayers put up for the recovery of the sick, yet at other times He seeth fit to deny their request. Perhaps it is His will that this sickness of mine should be unto death. Let me, therefore, think on this solemn event. It is foolish to put away the thought of death from us. To think of it will not make it come one moment sooner; and it will certainly come to us, sooner or later, whether we think of it or not. Let me, then, while my mind is yet entire, and I have still some strength left, make this the subject of my thoughts; and to help me to do so, I will read, or cause to be read to me, the following meditation.

MEDITATION XXVII.

ON DEATH.

"Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."* God alone knoweth the times and the seasons at which all events shall take place; but of this I am certain, that, whether it be in a few years, a few weeks, or a few days, this body of mine, which now feels and moves, shall become a cold and inanimate lump of clay. I shall close my eyes to everything that this world contains, and my soul shall enter into that unseen and eternal state, of which I have often heard, and but too seldom thought. Let me now, when I am, perhaps, nearly approaching to it, make this future state the subject of my meditations; and call to mind what that Holy Book, from whence we derive all our knowledge, has told us about it.

* Genesis, iii. 19.

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."* Death is a lasting memorial to the world, of God's displeasure at sin. How fearful would this be to the mind, if God had not revealed to us a way by which a sinner may yet be pardoned and justified! In the time of health and prosperity, I may sometimes so far deceive myself as to believe that I have all along discharged my duty faithfully, and that a righteous God cannot punish with everlasting misery such a well-behaved person as I am. But now, when I view death near at hand, when my eternal state may, perhaps, soon be decided, how do all these refuges of lies fail me! How many breaches of duty do I now perceive in my conduct to my parents, teachers, and companions; how much disobedience, and carelessness, and deceit; how many faults of temper and of disposition have I been guilty of, during my short life! And if I find so little that is good, and so much that is evil, in my conduct towards my fellow-creatures, how will my conduct to

* Romans, v. 12.

God bear examination! If I have so ill performed my duty towards those I have seen, who were hourly before me, reminding me by their presence of the duties I owed them, how ill must I have performed it to God, whom I have not seen, and whom I am so apt to forget! How little have I loved God! How seldom have I thought of my Saviour! How seldom have I prayed, except at those stated times when I was desired to do so! How completely have my time and thoughts been taken up with the things of this present world, although I know how trifling everything in this world is, compared with the great realities of eternity! I am altogether guilty in the sight of God. But, guilty and sinful as I am, God has revealed, even to a sinner like me, a method of escaping from His wrath and curse, due to me for my sins. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."* If I sincerely trust in Christ, as an unworthy creature who has no hope of pardon but through Him, then shall I be washed,

* 1 Tim. i. 15.

and sanctified, and justified. And such is the goodness and long-suffering of God, that if I have hitherto neglected the Saviour, and been careless about my soul, yet if I come to Him now, even at this eleventh hour, He will in no wise cast me off. Oh! let me cleave to this gracious Saviour, through whom alone I have any hope of happiness; let me pray earnestly to God, for a believing view of the atonement He hath made for sin. Oh! let me not be careless about this now, for, perhaps, my course is nearly finished; let me not be so much taken up with the comforts and accommodations of this perishing body; but let me anxiously pray for the salvation of this never-dying soul. Let me avoid the two extremes of presumption and despair; let me not think too confidently that I am secure, and that I have already come to Christ; and let me not commit the sin of thinking that it is now too late to come; for one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Oh, let me worship and bow down before the Lord my Maker. Though I may not be able, from weakness, to pray to Him as

I used to do, yet if I can but say, "Lord, save me, I perish:"—"Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief;" He will not cast away my prayer from Him. Nay, though I should not be able to utter a word, let me lift up my heart and thoughts to Him; and He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. "Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth."*

This pause is left for prayer.

Although death certainly has in it something solemn and awful, yet to one who firmly believes the Scriptures it should have no terrors. Those who are strong in the faith once delivered to the saints, have a desire to "depart and to be with Christ;"† thinking it "far better;" they are "willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."‡ And though I have not this strong faith, yet if I desire to have it, and wish that my mind may

* Psalm lxxxvi. 15. † Phil. i. 23.
‡ 2 Cor. v. 8.

be disposed perfectly to acquiesce in the will of the Almighty, He will hear my prayer for this grace, and grant me resignation. And, after all, what do I lose by leaving this world a little sooner than I expected, or, perhaps, wished? Were I to live longer in it, I might have a long life of pain, or difficulty, or affliction; or might become so absorbed in worldly concerns, as to forget the one thing needful, and might conclude an ill-spent life by a death-bed full of doubt and perplexity. All the people of God, of whom I have ever heard or read, declare that there are no real nor safe pleasures on earth, but those pleasures that arise from communion with God, and from doing His will; and if I trust in the atoning blood of Christ, I shall go to that blessed place, where those pleasures are enjoyed in full perfection; where the saints are "ever with the Lord;"* "and serve Him day and night in His temple."†

When we think that our life in this world lasts, at the longest, but seventy or eighty years, and that our existence in the next continues for ever and ever, of how little import-

* 1 Thess. iv. 17. † Rev. vii. 15.

ance it appears how or where we spend our time on earth, so that we secure a sure and certain hope of a blessed eternity! How apt are our carnal minds to regard this present world, and its affairs, as things of so much importance that they afford us a sufficient excuse for neglecting, or seldom thinking of, the great concerns of a future world; although not only shall we, ourselves, soon be called away from it, but God hath promised that He will once more shake the heavens and the earth, overturning the present system of things;—"the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth, also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved," continues the Apostle Peter to us, "seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless."* Oh! Lord, let me be found of Thee in peace, through Christ, who "is our peace."† Let

* 2 Peter, iii. 10, 13, 14. † Eph. ii. 14.

me be without spot and blameless, "having my robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb;"* being "in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."† Oh! Thou, my Lord, who didst favour the happy martyr, Stephen, with a sight of thy glory, to encourage and sustain him in his last moments, grant that I may have, by faith, such a view of the joy Thou hast prepared for them that love Thee, that I may be enabled to say, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."‡

* Rev. vii. 14. † 1 Cor. i. 30. ‡ Acts, vii. 59.

MEDITATION XXVIII.

ON RECOVERY FROM SICKNESS.

"Thus saith the Lord, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold, I will heal thee."* It hath pleased the Lord to raise me from the bed of languishing, and restore me once more to health and strength. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."† My Maker, in His infinite wisdom, has seen fit to prolong my stay on earth. And for what has He prolonged my life? Not surely that it may be spent in folly and vanity, but that it may be devoted to His service. Oh let me endeavour daily to be more conformed to the image of His Son Jesus Christ; that as it was His delight to do the will of His Father, so it may be my delight to do the will of God in all things. Let me give more of my thoughts

* 2 Kings, xx. 5. † Psalm ciii. 2.

and attention to the concerns of that eternal state, on the brink of which I so lately stood. Let me give all diligence to make my calling and election sure, in the time of health; for I now know, by experience, what an unfit place a sick bed is, in which to undertake any great or important work.

How anxious should I be to make a grateful return to those kind friends who have tended me in my sickness! I must show them that I am not forgetful of their kindness, by striving to be more obedient, and more attentive to them in future. And I should express my gratitude to God, for having bestowed those kind friends upon me, by doing all I can to alleviate the distress of the poor and sick, who want all those comforts that so much contributed to sooth my pain. And when I know that the only thing that can give comfort and hope in the prospect of death, is the knowledge of salvation by Christ, which we learn from the Bible, how anxious should I be that all those around me, and, indeed, that everybody in the world should possess this blessed book, and be instructed in this divine

knowledge! I should not only contribute what I can towards the promotion of these great ends, but should also pray often and earnestly to the Lord, that He would send His Holy Spirit, to give efficacy to all the means adopted for this purpose by human wisdom and prudence.

Let me often call to mind the views which I had of this world, and of the next, when I imagined myself near death. When I enter again upon the cares and duties of active life, let me give everything its due place in the scale of importance; let me remember that "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." * Many faults, which I thought but little of at the time I committed them, appeared to me heinous sins when I viewed them amid the calm reflections of a sick bed; let me recollect this, when I am again tempted to fall into the same errors. At that time, many things came into my mind which I had neglected to do; let me hasten to perform them, now that ability is restored to me. And, since I am not suffi-

* 2 Cor. iv. 18.

cient of myself to do any good thing, let me daily pray to God that, for Christ's sake, He would confirm, and keep me in the remembrance of, the good resolutions I made when I was sick. If I am not more watchful over my conduct now, than I was before my illness, it will be despising the chastening of the Lord, who, no doubt, sent this dispensation to forward, in some way, my eternal interests.

And though the Lord has, at this time, delivered me from death, let me not forget that it will one day overtake me. "For what is my life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." * Let me then pray earnestly, and strive diligently to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." †

* James, iv. 14. † 2 Pet. iii. 18.

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